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SUBJECT: BOUCHER DISCUSSES EDUCATION REFORM WITH NATIONAL  
KNOWLEDGE COMMISSION

REF: A. NEW DELHI 160

[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 711

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On April 4, Assistant Secretary Richard Boucher met with National Knowledge Commission member Deepak Nayar to discuss the state of affairs in education reform in India and possible areas of cooperation between the United States and India. During an hour long lively conversation, Boucher learned of the National Knowledge Commission's recent recommendations submitted to the Prime Minister outlining goals regarding the right to education, higher education, and vocational education. Boucher and Nayar also discussed the benefits and the obstacles for an education partnership between India and the United States and how we might work with others like Afghanistan. END SUMMARY

National Knowledge Commission  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) In June 2005, the government of India created the National Knowledge Commission as an advisory body to the Prime Minister whose objective was broadly defined to examine India's knowledge and education systems and provide recommendations so India can meet the knowledge challenges of the 21st century (reftel A). Nayar noted the strategy to get stakeholders and experts involved in developing recommendations helps to get them vested in the implementation of these recommendations. Since its inception, the Commission has submitted recommendations in ten areas, including the right to education, higher education, and vocational education which Nayar described in great detail.

## Right to Education

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¶13. (SBU) Though the Indian Constitution guarantees education as a fundamental right, Nayar said, funding problems serve as a barrier to access for all. The Commission's recommendation, Nayar reported, is that the central government needs to take more responsibility and invest more money into education. The problem, Nayar told Boucher, is that the center wants the states to invest more too, in order to demonstrate that they have a stake in providing a good education for their citizens.

## Higher Education

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¶14. (SBU) Nayar said that although the outside world might think the Indian higher education system is one of the best, it too is facing a crisis. Nayar outlined the problems as threefold: 1) not enough opportunities for the common person to attend a higher educational institution -- only 7% in India compared to 12% in Asia and 50% in the United States; 2) the quality of education varies immensely; and 3) too many are left out because of their caste, income levels, or family backgrounds. Among the steps to address these problems, the Commission is recommending to increase the number of universities from 350 to 1,500 by 2015. These universities would be smaller, limited to 5,000 students. Additionally, 50 of the universities would be national universities. Nayar noted he hopes ten of the 50 will be up and running in the next 3-5 years. In order to raise the standard of education

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an independent regulatory authority for higher education would be established. The largest barrier for this recommendation is that universities are created through an act of Parliament or the State Legislative Assembly. This could take some time, but is critical, Nayar emphasized.

¶15. (SBU) When Boucher asked about the prestigious Institutes of Technology and Management, Nayar told him those recommendations would be included in their assessment of professional schools. However, Nayar noted that expansion of these institutions is critical for the country, since, "islands of excellence do not lead to continents of excellence."

¶16. (SBU) The Commission is also looking at the United States' model of community colleges. Nayar explained to Boucher that another problematic aspect of reforming the Indian education system which functions under "old" think is that all teachers get paid the same salary. In order to create incentives for excellence he recognizes the need for not only accountability in the system but monetary incentives for faculty.

## Vocational Education

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¶17. (SBU) The Commission is looking to make a more flexible system so that those who go to vocational training schools can transfer their credits and can come back to academia if they choose. They are also looking for more innovative models to enhance and expand vocational training opportunities. Boucher and Nayar exchanged ideas on creative ways to provide quality vocational education and on the need for greater private/public partnership to set up new institutions.

## Expanding Investment Opportunities, Including Foreign Investment

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¶18. (SBU) Boucher first asked Nayar about the possibility of diversifying funding sources for education in India. Nayar wholeheartedly agreed that this needed to be a priority. He

believes India needs to go from spending only 3.5% to 6% of GDP on education. Other countries like Thailand and China, Nayar claimed are investing 8-9% of their GDP in education. Nayar also thinks that universities are sitting on goldmines, given all the property they own that they are not using and the rise in property value. India needs to look towards the private sector for funding as well, Boucher commented, adding that private money is often spent more efficiently than public money. In terms of allowing foreign investment, Nayar agreed on the need, but bemoaned the lack of government regulatory authority needed through statute which would permit such investment. Nayar also noted that such proposals, which have been introduced in Parliament, are extremely controversial. Nayar believes the legislation will pass, but does not know when or what it will ultimately look like.

#### Standardized Testing and Establishing an Education System -----

¶9. (SBU) Boucher and Nayar discussed the benefits of standardized testing to raise the quality of education in

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India. Boucher commented that national exams can indicate if a student in Delhi is achieving at the same level as a student in Bihar. However, Nayar pushed back, stating that while you do eliminate some variance in quality of education, national exams such as the SAT in the United States dampen creativity. Nayar believes India needs to bolster creativity versus dampening it. However, in reforming the education system for a place like Afghanistan, Nayar acknowledged that standardized tests and national regulatory boards might be a good idea. Both commented that corruption such as buying grades will pose a problem in any burgeoning education system.

¶11. This cable has been cleared by Assistant Secretary Richard Boucher.  
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